

THE NEXT STEP

FEET STEEL

Toby Whaymand

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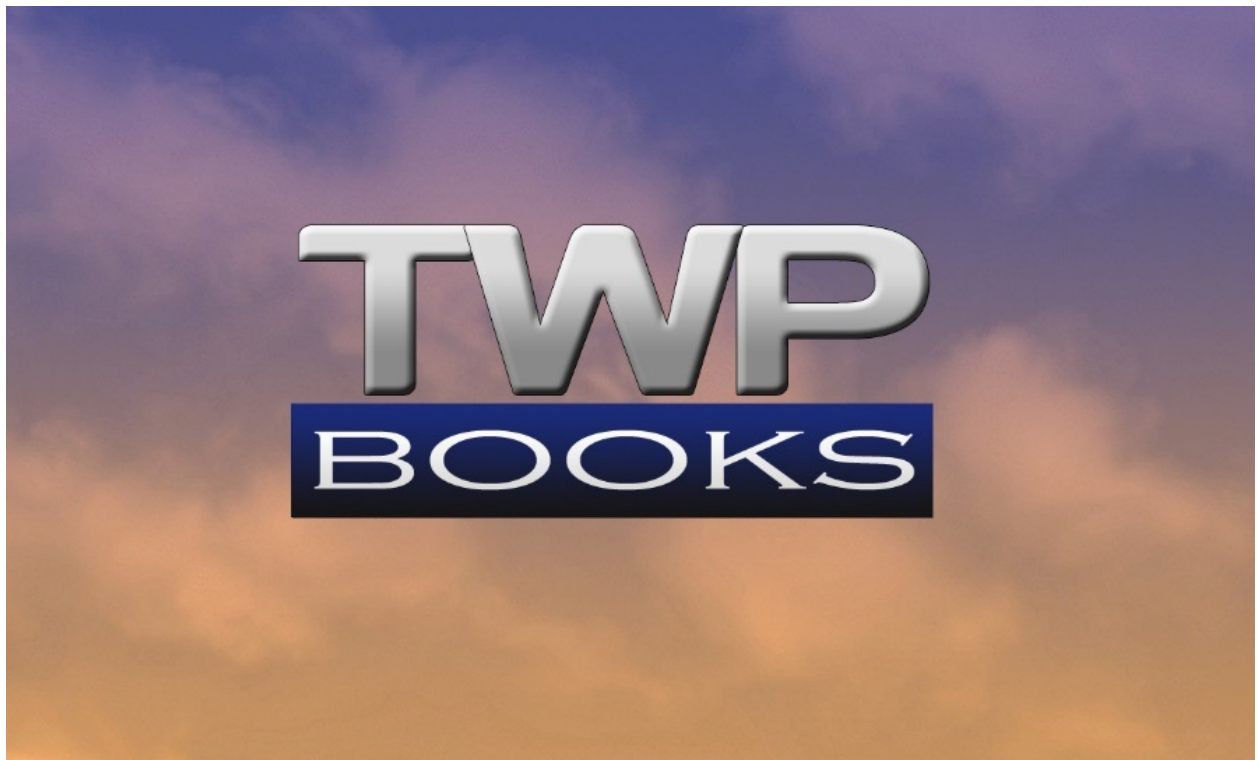
All characters in this novella are fiction. They have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relations to anyone bearing the same name or names

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This book is dedicated to my close friends Cato & Kent Sundberg.

*It is the similarities which make people close friends. Our love for Science
Fiction is one of the similarities which connect us.*

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost 1916

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The majority of characters in this book have been a part of me for the last 18
years

The adventure starts now....

New Beginnings

Earth year: 2288

The newly commissioned United Earth Starship, Nova 221406 sat orbiting her native planet. Her new captain was ill at ease. Susan always felt more comfortable being second in command, but now it was her turn to take the big chair.

Susan looked up toward the wall clock: “Where is she?” she said to herself impatiently, in a strong Texan accent.

“Captain Susan Atkins you have received a secure transmission” said the digital voice which mimicked a mature English lady.

“At last! Computer, accept transmission.”

“The incoming transmission is on a secure channel” the computer said again.

With an exasperated sigh, Susan sat down at her desk. She looked directly at the terminal so it could scan her retina. She spoke clearly. “Computer, accept transmission.”

Looking directly at the older lady in front of her, she said, “Happy Birthday mom”

Katie smiled: “56. I am feeling old. Unfortunately, this is no time for pleasantries”

Susan walked to the left of the room towards the wall-to-ceiling windows, sipping her coffee. She gazed out at the view below in awe. Calmness filled her soul at the pure wonderment and beauty of the sight. The redness of the sunset spreading across Earth—across the European horizon

Susan said, with quiet reverence, “The sky is on fire.”

Katie looked to her right, out of the window, all she could see was the Belgium sunset. She spoke softly. “Yes, yes it is.” Then more firmly: “The prisoner is very dangerous. You must only refer to him as CX589. Do not try to find out his real name.”

“I've read the report mom” Susan said as she turned around towards the photonic transmission which was coming from the United Earth Alliance headquarters in Brussels.

Katie looked at her daughter, feeling complete faith in her, but stressing the key points more for herself than for Susan. “He’s a professor in psychology, and, if given the opportunity, he will use his knowledge of human behavior to manipulate even those with the strongest will. This is why personal connection must not be made with him, unless it is absolutely necessary, and if so, absolutely no one-on-one contact. Any contact must be made in the presence of two senior officers at any one time. Security needs to be outside the brig, guarding the door, rather than inside, where CX589 can attempt to communicate”

“Would you like a coffee mom?”

Katie’s face brought calmness to the room when she smiled: “Green tea would be nice”

Susan raised her voice “Computer, cup, style Victorian design three, green tea, on desk Atkins alpha one”

Blue/green energy appeared on Susan's desk next to her terminal. The energy pulsed in small circles, within moments a Victorian style cup appeared containing steaming green tea. Susan walked to the desk and handed the cup to her mother. As Susan handed over the cup a white flash appeared around it, like a burst of electricity, but to Susan this was nothing new; she was expecting it, and did not give it a moment’s thought.

Susan looked at the cup. “I designed that cup myself. It was my third design.”

Katie looked at the cup with secret pride. “It is beautiful.” Katie then looked at her daughter, the seriousness of the situation showed in her face and was in her soul once again. Her next words were uttered in the voice of a stern leader. “Is it okay to beam CX589 directly to the brig?”

Susan nodded. “Yes. The arrangements are already in place.”

Katie turned to her right and placed her cup on an invisible surface, then started typing on equally invisible keys, her fingers moving quickly over, which seemed like, air.

A rather loud three-tone alarm sounded, followed by a female voice. “Captain, Admiral Katie Atkins is requesting CX589 to be transported to brig G1”

“Request accepted, Maxine. Please make sure all security are re-briefed about the procedures regarding the monitoring of this prisoner. Susan Out.”

Susan looked at her mother and smiled, “Is there anything else?”

Katie smiled warmly. “I will not be monitoring this mission. I am too involved since you are my daughter. Admiral Niemir Mazur will be overseeing your first mission.”

“The Polish man?”

Katie nodded slightly.

Susan raised her voice again. “Computer, end transmission.”

Katie softly disappeared.

Operation Weserübung

Tuesday April 9, 1940

Lieutenant Paulsen was heading away from Oslo when an explosion, so strong so intense, blinded him and rocked his Gladiator in the air. For a moment, fear threatened to overtake him, but he pulled himself under control and craned his neck to see. A German Do 17 swooped in from above, the smoke from the engine temporarily blinding him. Through the haze he spotted the plane, just as it came into his crosshairs. With pure hatred in his Norwegian voice, he shouted, “Dø, du Tysk tisse!” and pulled the trigger. He watched, with satisfaction, as his bullets smashed into the German Do 17. Instantly the Do 17 wobbled violently and spiraled towards the ground. Paulsen flew past, only to be blinded by flashes of white light which struck the corner of his eye.

The Death of Georg

The Present

The Joy consumed the stage at the great Spektrum Arena. The guests cheered with intense delight, the clapping would not stop. The Norwegian Music Grammy Awards was the biggest event in Norway. People traveled far to come to Oslo, but only a few were allowed inside.

Tobias Lindkjølen allowed the applause to feed his happiness. He smiled at his twin sister, Camilla. She seemed to be at one with the crowd. They had enjoyed fame since winning the smash hit music show 'Musikk Nå' audition six years before. Tobias waved his hands down, trying to quieten the crowd, knowing a state of ecstasy would take over the room when Camilla introduced the next guest.

As the clapping lessened, Camilla began to speak in Norwegian: “Five years ago, a group of friends shared a dream.” An inner glow ignited within Camilla as she remembered the past. Her face lit up with joy. “During this time, Tobias and I launched a competition on Music Now which allowed unknown bands to have the media attention they so deserved by airing their home made music videos.”

The audience clapped slightly as they realized where this was going.

Camilla smiled “The winner was the band who made the best video as voted by you, the viewers. The prize was to appear on Music Now and the winner’s album to be sold on our website and on iTunes, and, as if that wasn’t enough, there would be a paid tour with us during our festivals across Scandinavia.” Another, louder, wave of clapping traveled around the room.

Tobias spoke. “The videos you sent to us came flooding in, in all their formats, but in the end you, the viewers had one clear winner. The Nobody's with ‘It's Like a Dream.’” The audience went crazy with joy. Someone whistled, and the sound of the whistling was heard across Norway, as the Grammy Awards were being broadcast live. Camilla tried to quieten the audience as Tobias continued. “About a year after the tour the band seemed to fade from the public light, but ambition was in their souls and Georg and Clark, along with others, were working on their comeback—and boy what a comeback. They secretly signed a deal with Sony Records and took Europe by storm with their song ‘Don't Take

My Dreams Away.” Tobias smiled for a moment. “It gives me great pleasure to welcome . . . The Nobody's!” The response from the audience was deafening

The young men, Georg, Clark, Kjail, Asbjorn, and Thomas, followed by the older gray-haired Øyvind ran onto the stage. Knickers landed on Clark’s head. One of the cameras caught Mona Aronsen, the famous comedian, throwing them. Clark went bright red, but felt relieved they were clean.

Tobias and Camilla both laughed. Their producer’s voice sounded in their earpieces, reminding them of the time limitations. The network was due a commercial break shortly.

Camilla handed Georg the gold envelope.

Georg smiled and looked to the audience whilst taking the knickers off his brother's head. “It would give me great pleasure to let my brother have this moment.” Georg handed the envelope to Clark.

Clark ripped open the envelope, feeling the brotherly love, and read the card. “Wait, there must be some mistake.”

Tobias smiled. “There is no mistake.”

The nation saw the shock felt by all the members of the band. The great inner joy came out in huge smiles. Clark read the card to the people of Norway “The best new band is awarded to The Nobody's!”

The Arena went ecstatic. The camera moved back through the audience to an exuberant Mona.

Tobias handed Clark two more gold envelopes - excitement at an all time high. Clark looked at Tobias, speechless, as he opened the second envelope, the nation waiting on his every word. Clark read the card, so overwhelmed with emotions of delight that he felt nothing; it was all too much “Best new song is awarded to The Nobody's with ‘Don't Take My Dreams Away!’” The feelings inside were too strong. Clark, along with the other band members, started to jump up and down. The audience were getting anxious. Tobias looked at The Nobody's, feeling their excitement. Hearing the producer telling him the commercial break was overdue, Clark ripped open the third card. The smile on his face was as large as the joy within his soul. Best music video was awarded to The Nobody's for the song 'Alone, But Don't Walk Away Now.'

The Nobody's looked at the audience. Momentarily forgetting about the commercial break, and knowing they were onto a ratings winner, the producer ordered camera two to zoom in on Clark's face. The people of Norway felt his tears. It was a moment which would last a life time.

Kjail rested his hand on Clark's shoulder and spoke to the masses, "None of this would have been possible if it was not for you, our fans. The gratitude we all feel is intense, and we can't thank you enough. We need to say thank you to Sony Music Norway for having faith in us, and to our manager Øyvind Hansen." Kjail looked to the people "Normally they tell you in advance when you win a Grammy, but TV2 told us we won nothing!"

Tobias interrupted "The producers wanted to truly surprise you" The audience laughed as Tobias continued. "We do not normally know what is written within the envelopes, but, in the case of The Nobody's, we had to sign a contract of secrecy"

Kjail looked at Asbjorn and then to Georg who was on Kjail's right, then he faced the people. "There is a good friend of ours who came from America, who was wrongly accused of a crime he did not commit. It took an entire year before the Norwegian justice system realized they had made a mistake and released him from prison. During his time in prison, his ambitions and dreams were robbed from him, and he faced deep depression. Because of the media coverage during his case, we all know I am talking about Jack McCarthy. The emotions controlling Jack prompted him to write the song 'Alone, But Don't Walk Away Now.' When it became clear that Jack was a victim, and he was released from prison, Georg decided to work very closely with him, and, with the support of Sony Music, we turned 'Alone But Don't Walk Away Now' into a European smash hit. In short, we owe Jack a great deal for our success." Kjail spoke in English "We would like to welcome Jack up here on the stage..." The audience cheered as Jack ran up toward the stage and hugged each member of the band.

Clark looked at Georg with pride, but was interrupted by an intense burst of static electricity; the screaming sound of a motor filled the arena. An oddly shaped airplane came from nowhere and plunged, engines screaming, into the center of the arena before exploding into a fiery ball.

Screams of panic filled the air. Georg caught his brother tightly as they were thrown to the floor, and screamed in sudden agony.

Georg's scream filled Clark's ears as something wet and warm splashed on his face. Too scared to open his eyes, he began to hear more tormented screams. Clark opened his eyes and touched his face. Blood covered his hand, but it wasn't his blood. Through the yellow fire he saw countless people burning alive, but Georg was so still. "Georg!" he cried out, feeling sick.

Jack gripped Clark's shoulder turning him away from the scene. Knowing how sensitive Clark was, Jack pulled him into a fierce hug. "We have to get out of here. Some old plane crashed into the Arena!"

Clark numbly looked out into the arena, hit with a flashback of his media studies, when he saw the unmistakable tail section of, what looked like, a World War Two German bomber, but all he could think about was Georg.

"What about my brother!" Clark yelled over the deafening conflagration.

Jack knelt down by Georg and pushed his fingers into his neck to check his pulse. Nothing. He laid his ear on his chest and listened for a heartbeat or for breath—any sign of life. Nothing there either. The fire was spreading. He had to put his and Clark's safety over a dead man, no matter who he was, but Jack was unsure how Clark would react, and he was not totally sure that Georg was dead.

Without a word, Jack stood and pulled Clark into another hard hug.

Clark broke down and cried in Jack's arms, but there was no time for tears. Jack pushed Clark away. "Come on. We have to get out of here now." He spun Clark round and propelled him toward the fire exit.

Clark stopped halfway and turned to see Øyvind kneel beside Georg. He was relieved to see his manager still alive. Clark then saw someone behind him dressed in old fashioned Air Force clothing. In the confusion, seconds seemed like hours.

The Air Force officer pointed at Øyvind and screamed something unintelligible in the chaos. Suddenly, the sound of a bullet firing was heard by Clark which would stay with him for the rest of his life. Tiny flames burst from the strange person's gun. Øyvind's black coat was stained red with blood. Øyvind was thrown forward to sprawl limply on Georg.

Øyvind's dead body landed on Georg, his eyes staring, unseeing.

Jack took one look and pushed Clark into a run. Jack had one concern on his

mind. There was a gun-toting crazy man back there.

The German Air Force lieutenant was consumed with confusion. He was firing for his life, in complete fear. He had one bullet left.

Earth time period August 2027

Voyager 1 drifted on the winds of space, a cold and silent construction from a time and place long past and far, far away. Even the creators of Voyager 1 had long been dust, and those who followed them had turned their attention elsewhere. Suddenly, white energy appeared in Voyager's path. Within seconds the small man-made craft was engulfed.

Earth time period 1962

Voyager moved out of the tunnel at great speed, but something invisible was slowing her down dramatically. Something was controlling the satellite, some kind of technology. Voyager was heading towards a planet, which looked beautiful from space with its blue seas, white cotton clouds and continents.

Artificial control of Voyager was released, she was guided into the orbit of her new home. Gravity taking control, she started orbiting Troidon.

* * * *

The sun was clear and bright, a cold wind blew across the deep blue ocean. There wasn't a cloud in sight across the vast blue sky. Spikes speared out of the ocean, pointing high towards the sky. Six in total reached out towards the Gods. The purpose of this beautiful dark blue building was to turn the H₂O into electricity.

His long blue fingers glided over the holographic control panel. Controlling the terminal with his mind, the insubstantial control panel was the only visual he needed to direct the computer. His confusion and fear threatened the delicate connection. According to the Book of Beginnings, God said that Troyoris were the only intelligent life in the universe. For the third time, his concentration wavered, and the terminal went blank. To calm himself, he turned away from the terminal and entered the pool of warm water. Slowly easing into the water, he drifted to the center of the pool. He felt calm the moment he touched the warm water, its salty scent filling his nostrils, carrying away his worries. God was so close here in the touch of creation. The calmness filled him. Time ceased to matter as he poured all his worries into God's hands. Much relieved, he returned to the terminal and contacted the Leader.

Reise

Earth Year 2288

Susan Atkins sat in her comfortable white leathered captain's chair, impatiently watching the young female navigation officer in front of her.

The English voice of the computer spoke the words Susan had been waiting to hear. "Incoming audio transmission request from UEA Command."

Greatly relieved, Susan gave the necessary order. "Computer, accept transmission."

"UES Nova 221406, you are advised that Light Beamed Propulsion is due to commence in 59 minutes. Target location, Eris. Arrival time: 9 hours and 30 minutes. Please take the UES Nova to the coordinates, we will transmit after this communication. The particle accelerator is already in position for you. UEA Command out"

The navigation terminal gave a two-tone sound. "Captain, we have received the coordinates."

Susan smiled. "Position and prepare the Nova for light beam propulsion, Mirellia."

"Yes Captain."

Susan spoke again, control in her voice. "Prepare warp engines for warp factor nine to be fully energized in 13 hours. By then we will be clear of the solar system. Co-ordinate for the Alpha Centauri System, destination Troidon."

"Yes Captain. Estimated arrival time for Troidon: 2 days, 14 hours and 23 minutes," said Mirellia as her fingers danced over the control panel. "The warp engines are set to warp nine. Nuclear generators are powering up. The UES Nova should be ready for warp within 13 hours. Computer, begin warp countdown."

The emergency alarm sounded then stopped, as the computer's voice spoke. "Warp engines will be fully charged in 13 hours and counting." The emergency alarm sounded once more and stopped.

Susan looked to her left toward her Second in Command, Cato Lundstad. "Come with me to the brig."

Cato's eyes glanced at the young female controlling the Navigation station and said, in his Norwegian accent, "Mirellia you have the bridge"

Mirellia spun her chair round to face Cato who had been admiring Mirllia's Italian features. She spoke with confidence, "Yes sir"

In the corridor, Cato turned to Susan. "Should we not have the ship's psychiatrist with us?"

Susan looked at her Norwegian officer. "I will be brief. Just long enough to say what I need to say, then we will leave. I do not see the need for the psychiatrist, however, we should make her aware that we are going to communicate with CX589".

* * * *

Susan could not help but study CX589 for a moment, even though she knew she shouldn't.

"Captain I see you have brought someone along with you. How nice. How are you?"

Neither Susan nor Cato answered him.

Susan spoke coldly. "I need to restate this so that you hear it from myself. The Second Officer here is a witness."

"Do you feel attracted to him?" CX589 asked.

Susan continued as if the prisoner had said nothing. "You have been accused of murdering Troyoris and drinking their blood. You then escaped to Earth where you were arrested by INTERPOL...."

"Young—" CX589 tried to talk.

"Shut it!" Cato ordered harshly.

Susan continued. "I have been ordered to take you to Troidon where you will stand trial for your crimes."

Susan and Cato turned to leave the Brig.

CX589 shouted after them. “Young Troyori blood is the best, dear Captain. It would make you young and attractive again within days.”

The doors hissed as they closed, Susan turned to her security officers. “I want to stress the importance of not having any contact with CX589.”

Susan continued “If you do need to communicate with him, contact the ship's psychiatrist, April Johnson, and myself. Under no circumstances are you to go in there on your own”

“Yes ma’am.”

Earth time period August 1962

Around the blue Earth-like planet, known as Troidon, billions of Troyoris, across the planet, knelt to the ground in fear and confusion. Families traveled far to unite for prayer, many crying in despair. The Book of Beginnings teaches the people that God created the Troyoris as the only intelligent life in the universe. They had been lied to.

The cities were awash with emotional torment; riots abounded everywhere. The wooden churches were crumbling, and teachers of God were being murdered by the masses, law enforcers were overwhelmed. Overcome with sadness, a tear ran down The Leader's blue face as he watched the events unfold through a holographic viewer.

The Leader grieved for the beautifully crafted wooden churches. Inside every church was a beautiful image of Herm. It is said that Herm was the child of God. He spent his life teaching the ways of God. After his death, the Book of Beginnings was written. The images of Herm, which were found in churches across the planet, were made of stone. The wooden structure of the church and the stone figure of Herm connected the people with the Spirit of Nature. It was the Spirit of Nature which connected the people of Troidon to God. The Leader knelt to the floor and cried, not so much because of the loss of his faith, but for the loss within his people. The alien probe has essentially crushed everything that the Troyori race had believed to be true.

Earth, Present Time, in Norway

The sound of the gunshot was deafening. Dieter was terrified as he felt the warm blood running down his arm inside his shirt. His left cheek felt so hot, it throbbed so hard: Dieter could feel the stinging sensation. He watched the two men disappear through the back door; they were dressed in very strange clothes. The heat was starting to become unbearable. Dizzy, he looked at the smoke coming out of his pistol—his trusted Luger.

Suddenly, despite the intense heat all around him, Dieter felt an inner coldness, an overwhelming fear. Terror clutched his chest and shook his entire body. Blue/green energy surrounded the smoke from his pistol, and started to grow larger. Panic gripped the German soldier as he realized his gun was disappearing into this blue/green energy. He moved to toss the gun away, but he was too late. His hand, then his arm began to disappear. An artificial numbing took over his soul, and Dieter was unable to feel any emotions; he was unable to feel anything at all. A floating sensation came over him, he looked down at himself—only there was no self to see.

'Ich bin gestorben.' I am dead, he thought, thinking he was entering the next life. Blackness took all such concerns away.

A few hours later

Feeling incredibly tired, Dieter slowly opened his eyes. He was surprised to find himself lying in a bed. Alarmed, he opened his eyes wide, he realized it was a hospital bed.

The panic struck his soul again when he saw the very familiar black mustache facing him, smiling. Dieter sat up stiffly in bed. His blue eyes staring deep into the man who was looking at him, trying to read him. The surprise on Dieter's face could be heard within his voice "Führer Hitler!" with reverence he continued "It's an honor to meet you."

Hitler smiled. "The honor is mine. We have been waiting for you to regain consciousness." Hitler extended his hand to shake, and Dieter accepted it reverently. "You remember what happened?"

"No sir." Dieter answered

"You have done Germany a great justice."

Dieter interrupted, "Forgive me Führer, but where am I?"

Hitler frowned at the interruption, but let it pass and smiled again. "You almost offered the ultimate sacrifice for your country: your life. You nosedived your plane with all her explosives into the palace. You managed to eject before she crashed. You have destroyed the Norwegian Royal family.

I will award you the Knight's Cross for your brave accomplishment. To answer your question, you were found unconscious about two miles from where the palace once stood. We moved you to the hospital in Fredrikstad. Norway was too easy to conquer, it lacked challenge, no excitement."

"Have I been out for long, Führer?"

"Only a few hours. Once I heard about our greatest hero I had to come down to give my respects." Hitler smiled and jokingly nodded to the security guard on his left. "Adalbert here" Hitler then nodded to his other security guard on his right, "and Julian, wanted to meet Germany's greatest hero."

Dieter looked at the two security guards and smiled. He then looked at Adolf Hitler. "But I saw the strangest things: technology I've never seen before, people

dressed in the strangest clothes and—”

Hitler interrupted. “Before you awoke your eyes were flickering, your head was moving from side to side, don't confuse a dream with reality.

Dieter realized it was too strange, so it must have been a dream. He looked at Hitler. “How foolish of me. Of course it was a dream.”

On the bridge, Susan watched the main viewer; April Johnson crossed her elbows. Eyes transfixed on the view screen, Susan said to April in a commanding tone “It seems to be working.”

April's eyes did not move off the main viewer. “He is convinced he is in hospital and talking to Hitler”

“Good... Very good.” Susan said pleasingly.

Running

A few hours before

Georg's body lay, like a frozen puppet, surrounded by the heat of the fire. Susan saw the agonizing pain on Clark's face when he realized his brother was dead. It was the saddest moment she had ever witnessed, despite all of her experience. She walked over to the two lifeless bodies, quickly looking around, smoke and fire disguised her among the deceased. A choice had to be made, she looked at the two corpse, the Nova's memory could only hold one more person's genetic file, trying not to let emotions of her past take control of her judgment. The older person has had many years of life. Susan knelt, wrapped her arms under the older man's shoulders and attempted to stand up, he was too heavy, the body fluids had left his bowels, the smell made the sadness inside Susan deepen, a tear ran down her cheek. She pulled him away from the younger fellow and dragged him a few feet away; laying him on the ground. She went back to the younger man and knelt beside him, speaking to nobody, said, "Computer, Atkins Susan ASN2278132 enable emergency use." Suddenly, a holographic computer terminal appeared behind her eyes. (all United Earth Alliance officers had micro implants inserted into their brain for this purpose.) On the red holographic terminal screen Susan read the text, '*Emergency use enabled*'. Susan quickly glanced round to make sure she was alone with the smoke and fire. The screams of burning people had faded. The silence was the cold of death.

Susan unzipped the top half of her long brown leather jacket, slid her hand inside her jacket and removed her comm badge and placed it on Georg. Susan glanced round again to make sure she remained alone. The fire crackled, the smoke becoming increasingly intense, Susan saw nobody. She looked at the terminal and spoke in a commanding voice. "Computer tele-transport my comm to UES Nova Transporter 1. Repair damage and save file." Susan studied her terminal, following the text in red writing.

"Uploading"

Blue/green energy surrounded Georg, his body started to fade. Within moments his body was gone. He had disappeared.

Susan watched the terminal. '*Genetic file 01 uploaded*,' she read. A moment later, '*Repairing genetic file 01.... Repair complete.... Saving genetic file 01*'

Susan spoke again with urgency. "End Atkins Susan WHB2258732." The terminal disappeared. Susan realized her life was in immediate danger. She ran to the fire exit. Her feet lifted off the ground as she was pushed forward by a mighty explosion. Susan tucked herself into a ball, her eyes closed, she heard the tele-transporter, maybe from an act of God, she landed on some grass where she made herself roll until she naturally stopped. 'Thank God', she thought as she got up and ran away looking for somewhere she could be alone in this madness.

* * * *

The classic five notes from the piano played, followed by a sharp sound. A deep American voice spoke. "This is CNN." An astonishing film clip showing massive explosions appeared on the television screen, on the bottom left was the familiar black banner with white writing. It read 'Spektrum Arena, Oslo, Norway'. The image disappeared, the camera closed in on Christina McFadden, her beautiful features grabbing the world's attention. More images appeared again on the television, Christina spoke over them in her slow, clear, assertive voice. "Disturbing events have occurred in Oslo tonight. Tragedy has struck Spektrum Arena. It is unclear whether or not it was a terrorist attack. High numbers of deaths are expected. Norway was celebrating their Music Grammy Awards when this happened. We are receiving unconfirmed reports of a plane crash. The cause, at present, is unknown. Apparently a Norwegian television network, TV2, was doing a live coverage of the Norwegian Grammys when the event happened. All the equipment was seriously damaged..."

Christina paused, the camera closed in on her as she was pushing her ear piece into her ear, listening to the producer, she looked at the camera. "We can't show you these images because they are too extreme, but sadly they were broadcast across Norway, and because it was so sudden, there was not enough time to react. We can confirm that here, at our London studios, we have received footage which shows a plane crashing into the Arena. From what we can make out, the plane seemed to be an old bomber of some kind. It is unknown if this was a terrorist attack. The plane appears to be from around the World War II era. Again, this is unconfirmed..." Christina held her ear piece again. She looked down listening, then her light blue eyes pierced the camera. "We are going to take you over now to our sister network CNN US".

The camera moved to the large LCD screen and focused on another female anchor with almond hair. The image of the LCD television disappeared, and the cameraman in CNN's Atlanta studios in America took over. "We would like to

welcome our international viewers from CNN International, our sister network, who are joining us here tonight. I'm Hanna Rollison, and next to me..." The camera zoomed out to include the fellow next to her, dressed in a black suit, white shirt, and a light gray tie, "is Aaron Nunez."

Aaron's voice held intrigue.

"Norway's Prime Minister, Jann Bordevik, has said his heart goes out to the families who have lost loved ones. Norwegians must come together during this challenging time."

The images went back to the mighty explosions; the view, this time, from the air. Hanna did a voiceover. "The Norwegian network, TV2, was filming the Norwegian Music Grammy Awards. We can confirm this was a plane crash. TV2 had lost contact with all ground crew working on the event. We are bringing these live pictures from the state owned broadcaster NRK, Live from a helicopter."

Aaron followed on from Hanna "For an electro pop band called, 'The Nobody's' tonight was meant to be the happiest day of their lives, winning their first Grammy. The band has enjoyed success like no other Norwegian band. It was 9pm in Norway, and the night should have been all about The Nobody's." A picture of the band appeared on the screen.

Aaron continued. "The band was on stage receiving their awards in front of their screaming fans. The plane, which strangely appears to be an old World War II bomber, crashed in front of the stage, killing countless members attending the event. The plane exploded instantly trapping more people in the fire. It is unlikely The Nobody's survived."

Hanna interrupted "I need to interrupt you, Aaron. It's unclear where this plane came from. According to our latest reports, no planes were scheduled to fly across the airspace during that time. Secondly, we are learning that the plane was not detected by radar." Hanna looked at Aaron in disbelief. "This story is getting stranger by the moment."

Suddenly, the image appeared of an outside broadcaster, an older man with dark but graying hair, stood in front of the camera. The orange fire raged behind him, but at a safe distance. Hanna did the voice-over. "We are joining NRK's live feed. NRK is the Norwegian state owned broadcaster. Joining me at CNN Headquarters in Atlanta is Kine Hanson, our translator. Slowly, the sound from the

live feed increased. The siren of one of the emergency services could be heard in the background.

Trond Johansen looked at the camera and said nothing. The siren faded, Trond lifted his microphone and spoke into it. “TV2-folkene her i Spektrum Arena...” He fell silent as Kine translated the Norwegian into English “The TV2 crew, here at Spektrum Arena, were all caught in the explosion. It is feared none of them survived—”

The sound of an explosion forced Trond to duck down. Trond was at a relatively safe distance from the arena, but the fear was tangible. Trond faced the camera and spoke into the microphone again. “Flystyrten skjedde for fort og uventet...” The words fading into nothingness once more as Kine continued the voice-over...“The plane crash happened too suddenly, too unexpectedly. TV2 lost control, and the images of the crash were broadcast live to an estimated reach of 1 million people. What is most disturbing, and heart breaking, is that across Norway, young fans of The Nobody's were watching their idols receive their awards, a moment of extreme joy became the opposite, as they witnessed the plane crashing into the arena.”

Trond looked to the camera shaking his head slightly in acknowledgement, saying nothing. It was obvious that the NRK news anchor in the studio was talking to him.

Trond continued to talk in Norwegian. The moments were long as Kine ignored the pressure and listened to Trond's words carefully before translating into English. “Yes, it's unclear if anybody on the stage survived. Our hearts go out to our colleagues. If The Nobody's did survive, they would be seriously injured. It is not just The Nobody's' young fans, but fans of Music Now, who also saw their idols, the twin brother and sister, Tobias and Camilla Lindkjølen, share the same fate. Not to mention the much-loved comedian, Mona Aronsen, who often publicly spoke in support of The Nobody's, who had been in the audience.”

Kine paused a second or two then added. “All the people the reporter just mentioned are very famous in Norway. The Nobody's are a very much loved electric pop band. The band was in the prime of their career....”

Trond continued talking. The attractive voice of Kine turning his words into English “TV2 could lose their broadcasting license because this tragedy went out live on air. There will certainly be an investigation.”

Trond eyes looked deep into the camera "Åpenbart har tusener av unge mennesker og voksne blitt traumatisert og redde etter å ha vært vitne til disse hendelsene"

A moment passed before Kine translated: "Obviously thousands of young people and adults alike are going to be traumatized, many emotionally scarred after witnessing these events."

The sound of a helicopter began to overwhelm Trond's voice so he waited. Another explosion erupted from nowhere.

* * * *

Clark rolled across the grass, away from the exploding fire. He opened his eyes and saw tall thin legs in jeans walking towards him. He lifted his head and watched the woman. She had long almond hair and wore a long brown leather jacket. She knelt down to Clark and touched his shoulder "Are you all right?" she asked. Clark looked at this unknown woman and nodded, "Yes." He got up and saw the back of the NRK reporter talking to the camera. Clark looked at the stranger and smiled slightly, "Thanks." Clark then walked quickly away towards the NRK crew.

The cameraman made a strange facial expression to Trond and pointed behind him. Trond was confused by his actions. Suddenly he heard the new anchor in his ear piece, responding to what the new anchor was telling him. Trond turned and saw Clark walking towards him.

* * * *

Jack lifted himself off the grass. He heard somebody being sick. Jack instantly recognized his ginger haired chubby friend, Thomas, the drummer for The Nobodys. Jack ran towards him and saw his deep red eyes, tears running down his face. Jack could see that Thomas was trying to say something, but was unable to, his emotions were too strong.

"Are you all right?" Jack asked as he approached him. Thomas said nothing. Jack pointed at Clark towards the TV crew.

"C'mon" Jack said, as he ran towards him. Thomas followed, and within moments they were behind Clark who was talking to Trond. Clark looked down to the ground, and started to cry.

“It's my brother... he, he..” Clark found the words so difficult to say, “He’s dead!” Intense razor sharp emotions hit him as he finally managed to find the emotional strength to say the words. Thomas rested his hand on Clark. Clark turned round, emotions at an all time high, the weight of deep sadness at a level completely new to him. Clark hugged Thomas tightly. The camera moved in on Thomas’s face, the devastation he felt was obvious, it could see that Thomas was holding back. Slowly Thomas spoke.

“It's Asbjorn”, Thomas began to feel, very real, negative feelings which were new to him. He started to feel sick again, his eyes becoming almost bloodshot, as he tried to control his feelings. Finally he spoke, “I saw his chest covered in blood, his arms spread out, his face on the floor looking left, his mouth, his mouth...” Thomas tried to control himself as he cried “His mouth was open”. Thomas gasped for air, his emotions overpowering. “I saw Asbjorn’s internal organs, from... from his waist to near his lungs ..” Thomas was heaving in emotional shock. “His... Oh God!... His legs were amputated!!...” Thomas cried. He hugged Clark tightly who was also crying, overwhelmed. Thomas spoke quietly “I saw the insides of his guts...” Thomas and Clark both collapsed on the floor with incredible deep dark feelings which were completely new to them both.

Awakening

Troidon (Earth period 1962)

The rain hit hard on the glass, intense and visible. The rumbling sound of storm clouds were followed within moments by the electric sound of lightning. The Leader walked towards the windows. He watched the water fall far below onto the city of Sardon. The Leader looked at the holy water falling from the sky, feeling sad, angry and confused. The holy water landing on the city which was called Peace.

He watched the rain, anxiety burning deep inside of him. The Book of Beginnings was wrong. For the first time in many years, the Leader began questioning his faith, no longer knowing if the raindrops from the sky were holy or not. The sound of tapping as the rain hit the glass, gave the Leader some comfort. He felt the heat from the golden fire on his left cheek and arm. The fireplace, and the rain, made him feel great peace and joy. He walked to the fireplace, lifted his arms toward it and stretched out his blue hands. He felt the feeling of holiness, the emotions consuming him as he closed his eyes. The Leader smiled as he felt the joy, the connection to the Spirit of Nature; the feeling intensified as he felt his connection to God. He felt extreme peace, he lifted his face up towards the ceiling, towards the sky. "Thank you Spirit of Nature. Thank you God," he said softly, feeling contentment consuming him. The Leader slowly opened his eyes, turned round, and walked across the marble brown and white flooring. The light from above reflected brightly off the floor. He was feeling appreciation and happiness for being alive, spiritually connected to the truth. He walked towards his golden chair and stepped onto the slightly heightened surface and sat. Lifting his eyes away from the floor, he looked at the fireplace for a long moment, feeling the holiness, the happiness taking over his body - the joy made him smile.

The large brown wooden doors opened. A middle aged female walked in confidently, and smiled at him. The Leader greeted her with his green eyes and a smile revealing bright white teeth, well looked after and in perfect condition. Klema, feeling attraction which she would never admit to, felt an all-consuming tingling sensation. Feeling embarrassed, she tried to hide her feelings. The Leader was half her age! Klema's brown eyes met The Leader's green eyes, she felt the fire which comforted her so much.

“We have the location co-ordinates of the planet where the probe came from. These life forms seem to be a very interesting species. They sent a wealth of information.” The deep rumbling of thunder consumed the room. The Leader looked out of the window and nodded his head towards the bad weather.

“At least the rain stopped the riots and brought people back into their homes.”

Klema chose her words carefully, feeling the concern inside of her.

“Leader, as you know, the planet is located on the other side of the rip. They share our 24 hours, they have 365 days in a year compared to our 367 days.”

The Leader looked at Klema in confusion

“Sir, forgive me, but as you know, for us to explore deep space, we have to use the rip which uncontrollably takes us into the future. The species will, no doubt, be greatly more advanced than us.”

Starting to get used to the idea of another intelligent race, the Leader lifted himself from the golden chair, stepped down and walked toward the windows. Another sound of lightning struck. The Leader touched the window, outside was becoming light blue as the night started to set in. “I need to tell you something Klema, but it must remain confidential. Before I say what I need to say, please remember that I had no choice—I was sworn to secrecy.”

Klema said nothing, waiting for The Leader to continue.

“115 years ago, Scientists suspected the existence of this planet - they knew there was a very strong possibility it might contain life. With the reports from the time, from Scientists, The Leader of the time and other politically powerful figures decided that the risk was too low to be of concern.”

“Why?” Klema asked sounding concerned.

“It is true that the planet is in the future, and travel is only possible through The Great Rip, but time is on our side. This planet is only 65 years ahead of us in a much newer part of space. Scientists determined that Troidon is a few billion years older than this other planet, and we are in a much older part of space. Troidon has been around much longer and we, as a race of people, have been around a few million years longer. The politicians and scientists decided, at the time, that if there was life on this planet it would be us, the Troyoris, who would be the advanced technological race, and the alien's technology will always be

somewhat primitive compared to our own. It's becoming clear that Troyoris are a naive race. The entire notion of life on other planets was dismissed at the time because of the Book of Beginnings.”

The Leader turned round to face Klema; he studied her as she watched him, but he knew that she was not judging him, so continued “Some scientists were not happy about denying life on other worlds because of faith, so they started sending out a rather strong radio signal to this planet in hope of making contact. This sent out a chill within the larger scientific and political community. The reality is that we were unsure how technologically advanced they were. Everything we had on this planet was based on mathematics and scientific theories and so, for our safety, we decided to stop the transmission.”

Earth August 15 1977

Dr. Nathan Wells looked at his watch, feeling slightly hungry and tired, he rubbed his eyes. Time was dragging so slowly. As much as Nathan loved Ohio State University, he desperately wanted to go home to his wife and relax. He suddenly felt a twisting, intense feeling of stress. Carol was on a mission to get pregnant. *Most men would consider themselves lucky!* thought Nathan. He felt like a sex machine, not being able to keep up with Carol, with her emotional need to become pregnant. Nathan looked at his watch. It was getting close to 11.15pm. He loosened his tie and looked at his paperwork. Thinking about home, he stood up and twisted the knobs on his briefcase into the correct sequence. The golden clips sprang into life as they lifted up, he picked up his paperwork and placed it in his briefcase. Nathan turned around to face the door, he suddenly realized what he had just seen. He turned around again to the computer and watched the green line on the screen wobble. A few seconds later the signal intensified. Nathan rolled back the sleeve of his shirt and watched the seconds dial tick away 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1. Nathan gasped for air as the signal magnified while the Earth rotated into position. He looked at his watch again. Another 10 seconds passed, the signal was punching with all its strength. His eyes looked down again, the dial moving round 10,9,8,7,6,5... the battery on his watch was failing. He tapped the watch, consumed with anxiety and excitement. 5,4,3,2,1... Exactly what should happen actually happened. The signal became weaker as the Earth started to rotate away from the signal source. Another 10 seconds and the signal, which, only moments ago was pounding Big Ears, became incredibly weak. Another 10 seconds passed, the signal became feeble, static, retaking the sound of the cosmos.

Nathan looked at his watch again: 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1. The signal turned into emptiness, the calm sound of static becoming all-consuming. He carefully ripped the paper away from the printer and looked at the readings. The tightness of the inner glow, the tightness of joy took over his soul. He picked up the black phone which lay on his desk and, placing his finger into the slot, he started to rotate the dial to make a phone call. The dial started to hurt his rather large fingers. Nathan was slightly relieved when he finished rotating the numbers. The ringing tone... "Pick up!" Nathan said to nobody, feeling he was about to explode with emotion.

The ringing tone stopped. "Good evening Dr Kogane. Yamada speaking" said the voice with very strong Japanese origins

“Hi Kogane, it's me Nathan. Sorry for phoning so late”

“This better be good.” Nathan knew Kogane well enough to know that he was joking. Nathan couldn't keep the excitement from his voice “Sorry about phoning you so late Kogane, but I think you should come down to the university. I believe we have picked up an extraterrestrial signal—”

Nathan heard a bang which sounded like a door slamming.

“Hello Kogane??”

Still nothing... moments passed, then suddenly there were some rusty crackling sounds... The light, happy, but confused voice of Kogane's wife spoke “Hello?”

“Asuka, it's me, Nathan”

“Nathan. Hi, I don't know what you said to him, but Kogane dropped the phone and just jumped into the car. He said he was going to the University.”

Nathan laughed.

“Nathan, Kogane is only wearing his pyjamas and night robe. He's got his special 'driving shoes' on”

Earth year 2288

Susan's left arm rested on the settee, her legs were crossed and her right arm stretched out along the back of the settee. She looked above her right arm. Her eyes skidded above the light blue ocean of the Earth, towards the stars, towards the blackness of space. Guilt started to consume Susan's soul "CX589 admits to murdering Troyoris, so, basically, the trial is just a formality. It's more than likely he will face the death penalty." The stress inside Susan increased. "The death penalty was abolished on Earth centuries ago."

The slightly overweight Admiral Mazur looked at Susan. He looked inside her, at the emotions she was expressing, so strongly, with her body language. Secretly Niemir was pleased that Susan was thinking about this issue; Susan was showing the makings of a good captain.

Niemir began to talk in his slightly squeaky high pitched Polish accent "Because of the treaty, we do not have a choice. We have to hand custody over to the Troyoris to keep the peace"

Susan laughed sarcastically "The Troyoris claim to be a race of peace, yet they have the death penalty."

The rhythm of the three tones sounded. The professional voice of Mirella came through: "Captain. Light Beamed propulsion in 15 minutes"

"Thank you, I'm on my way. Atkins out"

Susan lifted herself from the settee

"Well good luck Captain" Niemir lifted his hand towards Susan and she shook it.

"Do you want me to contact you again?"

"If you have any problems of course, but, to be honest, I think you will be fine. However, you should contact me once the mission is complete. I am looking forward to signing you off Susan, giving you full control of the Nova. You deserve her."

Susan smiled.

Niemir raised his voice “Computer end transmission” instantly the great Admiral Niemir Muzur faded into nothingness. Susan took a breath and walked towards the doors, the deep sound of humming as they opened. Susan stepped onto the bridge and sat next to Cato in her white leathered captain’s chair.

Bullet

Susan looked at the viewer and saw the delicate ice blue Earth skimming beneath the blackness of space. Nothingness. She gave the order, the image of the viewer changed to an outwards direction, looking along the Nova towards her stern.

The long, round propulsion particle cannon, its scarlet metal provided a warning of aposematism moving slowly along behind the Nova. The cannon stopped.

Slowly, the cannon began to turn around, positioning itself with the array, targeting the exact position of the flat stern of the Nova. The cannon locked on to the Nova, the white energy of the array powering up. Suddenly, the particle beam exploded out of the cannon and hit the stern of the Nova with tremendous force. Whiteness was all-consuming. Seconds before the explosion, so well timed that only a computer could provide the accuracy needed, the viewer, which Susan and everyone watched so intently, instantly changed to the Nova's bow view.

A dark shade appeared on the viewer. The blinding white light never touched the eyes of the bridge crew.

Green energy briefly trickled across the UES Nova stopping the g-force as the ship pushed forward at near light speed. The field became invisible again protecting all on board of her. All was silent.

* * * *

CX589 started to feel hot, his insides twisting, tightening, finding it hard to breath, the reality of his approaching death becoming all too real. He was having a panic attack. Suddenly, in front of him, blue/green energy appeared, a figure of a young female began to emerge, with long auburn hair, forming in front of CX589. Her facial expression was very serious. CX589 felt confused. April pointed her small black phaser at him and fired an energy bolt at CX589's chest, directly at his heart. CX589 flew uncontrollably backwards, hitting the cushioned cell wall. He was unconscious before he hit the floor.

* * * *

Dr Brian Federman was watching the readout on his terminal, listening to Susan.

Everything seemed to be in order. Brian's dark African fingers rested on the large white semi-circular button. Brian pressed down on it, the terminal instantly went blank. Brian's face turned towards Susan, his dark brown eyes studying her as he gave Susan his full attention. Brian's voice was deep as he spoke.

"CX589 was having a panic attack. Because of the danger with communicating with CX589, April's only option was to stun him and beam him to sickbay where I can keep him sedated until we arrive at Troidon. From a medical, and psychological, point of view, both April and I believe that keeping him asleep is the kindest course of action for him. He must know that the only outcome of the trial is his death."

Listening to her chief medical officer, she said nothing. Susan looked out the office window to her left, watching CX589 laying there helplessly in darkness, apparently in complete peace. She crossed her legs in an unconscious expression of deep thought.

"I tend to agree with you doctor, but I must be clear. CX589 must remain sedated. Any communication with CX589 is strictly forbidden. When the time does come, he must regain consciousness in his cell. April and myself are the ones who will have to stay with him while he comes too." Susan placed her hands on the arms of the chair, feeling the weight as she lifted herself up. "Keep me informed of any changes."

"Of course Captain," Brian answered

* * * *

The hours passed, the evening came fading into night, melting into the early hours of the morning. Heaviness consumed Susan's eyes. Her pink, luxurious duck feathered duvet looked so appealing, so inviting. She had never known anything else, but the technology which brought her these things, even so, she looked at the pink fluffy duvet, and the feather filled pillow case and felt joy and thankfulness; appreciation towards the technology, towards the simulator which gave her these luxuries and food on her plate. Susan took a swirl of the Guatemalan black coffee. The earthy taste made Susan make a mental note not to replicate this coffee again. She took another sip. The softness of the coffee felt so cosy; the warmth gently touching her throat, kissing her, caressing her. The deep full bodied flavour becoming more pleasant with every sip. This coffee was quickly becoming one of her favorites.

Herm was, and is, the connection to God, according to the Troyori people. Susan's fingers touched the corner of the page, and felt the roughness of slightly yellow paper due to age. The book was only a week old. Susan used the simulator to age the book as it was created from nothingness. She read how Herm sat the people down around a campfire and looked up towards the stars, pointed towards the brightest star, the star of Clama Herm looked towards the stars and explained that there are other worlds like this one, but none of them contained life. The gift of life is more precious than water, more precious than food. Herm looked towards his eleven followers one at a time, and said, "God has only given life to the world of Troidon and no other. He commands us all to share the two most richest elements of our world, food and water, freely with all Troyoris, to all life without restriction. This is the way to happiness and purity."

Susan felt a deep glow within her chest, contentment consuming her body, her soul. She slowly closed the book and looked at the deep sea blue leather, at the engraved image of the two Troyoris opposite each other, palm to palm connecting with God. She knew from her studies at the academy that the Troyori on the right was an engraved imprint of Herm. Susan stroked the hard leather, feeling the lumps and bumps of the engraving, knowing somehow, that Herm was a real person. She had no proof, she just knew. Susan was not religious.

The First Step

The present

Dr Olivier Fraborn typed the coordinates into the computer. Her green eyes looked at the raindrops as they dribbled down the window outside. The big white Gregorian telescopes turned to position, listening in on the universe. The telephone rang. Olivia picked it up, wrapping the cord around her fingers. It was Nathan Wells. Olivia, remembering Nathan's retirement party, smiled "Hi Nathan!" Her voice became passionate.

Holding the receiver with her shoulder, she did what Nathan asked and logged into ABC News Now and watched the live feed. "My God" she said in shock, as she watched the exploding fire, firing out from the Spektrum Arena. "Is it a terrorist attack?" Olivia asked.

Listening to Nathan, her hand moved through her soft blond hair, her eyes moved to the right hand corner of the screen, to the rectangle displaying the strange image in the night sky. "Is that, a—" Olivia paused in confusion, disbelieving what she was about to ask "Is that a UFO? A spaceship?"

Nathan spoke "We are studying it here at NASA. Unfortunately an amateur astronomer recorded these images using a 10-inch Newtonian reflector in his back yard.

The coldness of shock overtook Olivia's soul.

* * * *

"Captain, we are receiving multiple radio waves both in visual and audio format. Our sensors are also detecting old style digital signals both in audio and visual." The young ensign's fingers guiding the touch pad of her command station, gathering more information. "Captain, these types of radio waves went out of service nearly 200 hundred years ago, the digital signals went out of service in 2218"

Susan placed her hands on the arms of her captain's chair and lifted herself up. She looked at April in disbelief.

"Television."

April looked back at Susan, feeling surreal, not knowing what to say. Susan looked at the viewscreen “Put one of these signals onto the viewer.”

The image changed. Susan stepped back in complete shock, a feeling of tightness in her chest. The language was French; images of fire and explosions from a building. Susan took a deep breath when she saw automobiles—the type she read about in the history books. It was obvious they were emergency services. The coldness of panic struck Susan; on the top left hand corner of the viewer was a rectangle, displaying the Nova orbiting Earth.

“Pull back now! Get us out of visual range!” Susan ordered with alarm and mighty strength in her voice.

As the UES Nova pulled away from Earth's orbit, the television signal began to fade “Keep a lock on the signal!” Cato commanded as he stood. Cato looked at Susan. “Time travel—but how?”

Susan did not answer him, her eyes focused on the viewer, noticing the words on the right of the screen 'TV5 Monde.'

“Translate this broadcast” Susan ordered. Instantly, the French sounding male voice turned into an English one. The image changed to an older gentleman interviewing a young man in his twenties outside the building at a safe distance. The Nova's translation technology allowed Susan and her bridge crew to watch the broadcast as if the two men were talking in natural English.

Susan walked around to the terminals behind her. She rested her hand on Maxine's shoulder indicating for her to step away. Susan tapped some commands into the terminal. Moments passed - her voice became loud. “Cato, come and take a look at this”

Cato walked toward Susan, his thick black curly hair flipped forward, his sea blue eyes studying the electronic map. Susan pointed to the terminal to an area of the map.

“It's relatively safe to beam down here, we can do it discreetly. I am going to go down to the surface. I want you to take full command of the bridge”

* * * *

Blue/green energy was all-surrounding. Cato watched the viewer intently, seeing the energy fade; seeing from Susan's viewpoint as she looked around hearing the

sound of fire. Suddenly, the evil sound of a pistol firing was heard with an explosive sound. Susan touched the brick wall as she turned. The wall was slightly cold, indicating the other side should be safe. As she turned she saw a fallen young man lay while another younger figure looked on. The wall, the smoke and fire concealed her identity. The heat becoming more intense.

Susan felt the pain of the younger person as she looked down at the lifeless body. The sharpness of the empathy Susan felt was extreme and deep. She looked at the corpse, her eyes moved towards the younger person. They looked alike. She realized they must be related; most likely brothers. An older person approached the tormented soul and hugged him deeply. Sensing the deep connection between the two, a flashback to the death of Susan's younger sister brought out raw emotions in her.

The moment passed, then the older person tried desperately to get his good friend to come with him. An older, grey haired man ran toward the duo and knelt down by the body. Suddenly, without warning, the deep loud sound of a second bullet fired, ripping through the chest of the older man. Susan's body moved to follow the direction of the murdering bullet. Nothing could prepare her for what she was about to see. Overwhelmed, a deep breath struck her, seeing a ghost from the past. Her eyes stayed focused on him. "Cato, that person I'm looking at - he's holding a hand weapon; a revolver"

"Yes Captain, we have a lock on him!" The voice deep within the back of Susan's brain, because of the neo-cortex implants.

The deep sharp sound of slamming. Susan's eyes briefly caught the young pair making their escape through the fire exit.

Her eyes quickly moved back to the strange man wearing the military clothing from a dreaded time in history. "Tele-transport him, but save the genetic file. Do not reassemble, we need to figure out what to do with him later."

"Understood," acknowledged Cato.

The Last Step

Troidon

The sharp razor blade of ice cold wind brushed across her face, golden leaves crunching as she walked across the frozen green grass. She felt overwhelmed with the rawness of ice, the almost burning sensation as the soft fluffy snowflakes gently melted on her face; the blazing sensation most noticeable around her cheeks under her eyes. It was helping rid her of the fatigue she felt from lack of sleep the night before.

Looking ahead, she saw the guards becoming bigger. As she approached them, she felt intense anger in her soul, the burn of emotions the humans must not see. Approaching her men, she noticed the three Troyoris were not standing on the pebble concrete path. She guessed it was probably too icy to actually use.

She acknowledged all three of her guards with a nod, one of them said “Leader” in greeting.

“Let's get this over with.” Emotions burning inside the Leader despite the brisk coldness. Removing her thick woolly gloves, she gave them to Telma to hold for a moment. Sliding her hand in her pocket, she removed a gold device which shone beautifully against the backdrop of ice and the increasing snow. The Leader flipped the elegant technology and pressed the large silver button in the center.

“UES Nova we are ready for your transport,” a strong, country accent in her voice as she spoke the foreign language she had spent a lifetime learning, almost to perfection.

A male voice full of professionalism: “This is the UES Nova. We acknowledge your communication. Please standby.” The beautiful gold communication device vibrated a little as the Leader held it in her blue hands. A moment passed, suddenly a stream of blue/green energy streaming down caught the corner of the Leader's eye. She turned round as the energy moulded into the shape of three human beings. A few seconds later CX589, with Susan and April behind him, started fading into existence. Susan and April were pointing something small towards him. The Leader knew they were holding phasers. The three of them became solid. Within a split second, the two Troyori guards grabbed CX589 by

his arms, taking him into custody, pushing him away from Susan and April, away from their protection. CX589's eyes stayed focused on the floor, never looking up. Susan walked toward the Leader, showing her a small handheld device "This is the gravitational lock I told you about, which is holding CX589's wrists together." Susan pointed to the red button, "It's very simple to use, you just press this button to release him, and use the keys to type in the code which we transmitted to you on the secure channel"

"Yes." The Leader nodded in acknowledgment.

"On CX589's wrists there are some black pads which have become a part of his DNA. These pads are the gravitational locks. If you need to restrain CX589, just put his wrists in a cross shape, like they are now, so that the pads are touching each other and press the button" Susan pointed to the same button again. "The lock will be automatic, you only type in the code to release"

"I understand," the Leader confirmed

Susan smiled and gave the device to the leader, holding the uncomfortable feeling inside, knowing the trial was an illegal sham and she had just sent a man to his death. In deep hope she was not showing her emotions, she continued, "The gravitational locks on CX589's wrists can only be removed by the UEA's tele-transport technology. We have used our DNA technology so they have become a part of his skin."

The Leader's chestnut eyes focused on Susan "Thank you for bringing him to us - he will receive a fair trial."

The words were too much for Susan. Swallowing the sharp, deep pain, she said nothing.

The Leader, sensed something was not quite right, curiosity written across her blue face, her large eyes beaming into Susan. The unspoken words.

Susan lifted her hand, the smile became real "Well it's been a pleasure to meet you. I just wish it was under more pleasant circumstances."

"Likewise, Captain, likewise" The tone in the Leader's voice indicating that she knew there was something more than what was being said. The hand shake ended.

Susan looked behind her at April, acknowledging they were both ready to leave.

Stepping away from the Leader Susan pressed her comm badge “Captain Atkins to UES Nova, two to beam up”

* * * *

The Leader watched the blue/green energy consume the two UEA officers. The anger burning inside of her, she watched as Susan and April faded into nothingness. The two guards forcefully held CX589.

CX589 became startled and confused, fear consumed him, the Leader’s skin becoming an evil red; no human had ever seen a Troyori react like this. It was completely unknown to the UEA. A strange unearthly sound came from the Leader. CX589 tried to struggle, but the two guards held him tight. The satanic redness of the Leader, her hand grabbed his neck, fingers gripping in, sharp piercing sensations around his neck as if the five fingers were injecting something. CX589 tried to scream, only the sound of air came out.

A tightness consumed CX589's chest - the pain was agonizing. Unable to speak, he realized he was having a heart attack. He knelt to the floor keeping his weight with his left arm, using all his strength. Suddenly, a sharp deep extreme pain around his jaw - one of the guards kicked him. The bang within his head, the headache as he landed on the icy snowy grass; the sharpness of the cold; unable to breathe, gasping for air, feeling a desperate need. The infinite pain in his chest, consuming his body, seeing only the legs of the Troyoris, as he lay on the grass. The pain subsided.

“Life for a Life!” One of the Troyori muffled. In the confusion CX589 did not know which one said it. Blackness set in. Coming to again, CX589 turned his head to look at the sky for the last time. The blackness consumed him; his body became loose, the life force was gone...

The red of violence faded from the Leader's skin and the calm blueness took control. The Leader looked at her two guards. “Use this corpse to program the holographic ammeter. The UEA have requested they review the trial, so we will give these pathetic human beings a trial.”

* * * *

United Earth Ship Nova was on her way home. Approaching the weaker space, moving forward until the fabric of space became so weak it was ripped open by the mass and weight of the Nova as she entered the The Great Rip. Traveling 65

years into the future into a newer part of space... or so they thought.

* * * *

The corpse of Øyvind's brown eyes, though open, saw nothing. The gentleness of blue/green energy began to surround his body. The shell, which was once a life, faded into nothingness... April's idea went into action...

* * * *

Maxine's voice showed some confusion: "Captain we are unable to establish communication with the UEA, we have lost contact with Troidon."

The alarm sounded once and the elegant English voice of the computer announced, "Warp in one hour and forty-five minutes"

A Matter of Time

Dr Joseph Harris

1984

Dusk was setting in, so I reached over to my lampshade and switched the golden knob on. Looking at my calculations, my mind was a blank. Rubbing my eyes in tiredness, I looked out of the window and saw the cracked paint, the job I keep putting off. The window needed a clean, but I would not let my wife into my study, the untidiness gives me comfort, allowing me to concentrate on mathematics. My eyes focused on my granddaughter, Lilly, unconcerned about the chill which must be approaching outside. She sat on the grass with the old ice cream carton. She had her wooden spoon stirring away at her greatest new recipe, wondering what great thing she was conjuring.

Lilly lifted the old empty carton in front of her eight year old face, the eyes seeing something which was not there in self play. Suddenly it hit me, in full concentration I was absorbed within my calculations, thinking. Thinking about the presentation I had done at the TCNJ the previous week as I tried to explain to students, that, under a microscope, nothing is smooth and if you could magnify enough, you would see that even the space around us is not smooth, full of holes which come and go.

I became lost in thought, a chill came upon me. I'd looked up at Lilly, who got up and placed the wooden spoon in the old ice cream carton. The realization, the sharp sensation took over my body.

What if the holes in the fabric of space are not a means of time travel, but rather a way of connecting one part of the universe to another, I said to myself. Obviously my mindset was hypothetical. Getting up from my chair, I walked towards the mirror which once belong to my grandmother, the truth hitting me deep within my gut. The tiny, tiny rips in the fabric of space cannot be two elements of time linking together, but two parts of the universe, or maybe linking two parallel universes. This made sense, the calculations becoming clear. Many years of work are still needed. I imaged a universe parallel to our own. What would it be like? Does it exist among our own universe in some way, in some kind of wrap? or maybe it is outside of our universe altogether. I allowed my mind to wander as I paced into the laundry room in excitement, and picked up

the flashlight. I quickly walked back into my office, bashfully ignoring my wife. My mind went into deep thought as I turned on the flashlight, moving it around and around in a circular motion as I watched the beam of light in the mirror.

I heard the door creak open, I looked down towards my left. Lilly was eyeing her Granddad with such joy, she lifted up to me the empty carton and I said, “Mmmm a cake?”

“No Grandad it's biscuits!”

I dipped my hand into the carton, and, picking one of the pretend biscuits, I placed it in my mouth. “Chocolate, very nice” as I chewed on air noticing that Lilly was looking at me angrily.

“No Grandad, they are peanut butter biscuits!”

Honorable Deception

The deepness of thought consumed Susan deep to her core. She stared ahead, but saw nothing. The electronic sound of the computer interrupted her thoughts, followed by its spoken words: “Automated transmission.”

“What?” Susan asked in complete confusion

“Who initiated the transmission?” Cato barked

Cato got his answer from the image of Admiral Mazur on the main viewer, the dark wooden oak walls behind him with the UEA insignia in its familiar blue and gold writing. Niemir was seated in formal dress. A moment passed before he began in his strong Polish accent. “This is a pre-recorded message. Please pause this message if Captain Atkins is not already with you. You need to listen to me carefully—”

“Computer pause transmission,” Susan interrupted.

The computer’s electronic signal indicated it had understood the command, then it spoke its confirmation “Transmission paused.”

“Where has this transmission come from?” Susan’s voice, stern and in control

A young Stephen Knight looked down at his read outs, which did not make sense. His blonde hair moved forward as his sea blue eyes studied what the terminal was telling him. His finger guided over the touch screen, reading the route of the data. Curiosity within his face and voice, his words deep and strong. “Captain this message seems to be pre-programmed into the Nova memory...” Stephen’s fingers did a three step dance on the terminal, “three months ago.”

Susan interlaced her hands. “Let’s see what Admiral Niemir forgot to tell me during our first meeting. Computer resume incoming transmission,” Susan said, placing her hands on the arms of her Captain’s chair as she got up. She started to walk forward toward the viewer standing, virtually, next to the large screen which almost filled the front of the bridge.

The high pitch of the Polish accent was strong. “Please forgive us, please forgive me, but we had to ensure that these events were carried out. The dependence of life and the universe itself may have been at risk. It’s vitally important that you

listen to me carefully.” Niemir paused. Susan’s full focus was on the recording as it continued.

“You are here in the 22nd century already, and it was you who reported that The Great Rip somehow became unstable. Your adventure was a great challenge, and you overcame many obstacles. On your way home, while you were in the The Great Rip, something went wrong and you jumped onto another timeline. You, we are now on a loop, a rerun, if you will. The questions you have are obvious, but, for the sake of keeping the reality of what you know of your future to remain true, I cannot give you the answers. What I can say is that I have seized an opportunity to make your journey home a much easier one. As you know, Quantum Mechanics states that you have created, or jumped, onto another timeline, so when you arrive home it will not affect the reality that I know. You will not be meeting yourself, because, in your reality, you are where you are. We are so lucky that the distortion brought you to this date. Tomorrow will be Sunday 19 February 2010. Again, how I know this I cannot say. You will be beamed down to co-ordinates which have been hard-wired into the Nova memory and are being displayed on Stephen’s terminal now...” Niemir paused.

“Captain, we have the co-ordinates,” Stephen stated.

Niemir continued in perfect time, a cold knowing time. *How can this be?* Susan thought

“At 0300 hours Sunday morning a scientist, in your current time period, is switching on a machine which can do more than he realizes. He believes that the machine is limited to sending subatomic particles to the future. He is wrong.

You will beam down to his location and ask him, and, if necessary, others from his time period to come back to the Nova with you. Please remember there might be variables in this report. Expect the professor to be in a state of deep surprise and shock, but it will quickly pass. You have to consider that the nature of the experiments make time travel seem more plausible. You must swear them to secrecy because your future depends on their silence. They do honor this. It is of paramount importance that the machine stays on and never shuts down, to keep the two parallel universes linked. Please understand that, even now, I wish I could give you the answers, the explanations, you seek, but the success of this mission depends on my silence.

When they turn the machine on, they believe that only subatomic particles can travel to the future, a future in a parallel universe. This is not the case. Verbal

communication will be made: distorted but audible. We will also send data to your internal implants. This data is information on how we are going to get you home. We know it works, because you are here.

The person in the army clothes is from the World War II period. This situation is a little more difficult. You are ordered to keep him in the holographic room for now.

I will see you again Captain. I will not know it, but another me from the timeline you jump into will.” A smile grew across his reddish face, “Niemir out.”

Susan turned round to look at her crew. For the first time in her career she was speechless.

The Beat That My Heart Skipped

Susan's fingers wrapped round Georg's shoulder. She looked at the unknown man, almost as a mother would her son. Her eyes lifted slowly and focused on the ship's doctor. "Have you given him the dose of Alprazolam which I ordered?"

"An hour ago. His emotions will dampen down, it's unlikely he will feel intense alarm when we wake him," there was no mistaking the professionalism in Brian's voice. "But we need to do it now, before the drug wears off."

"Do it!" Susan ordered.

Brian raised his voice "Computer, bring into consciousness the male on medical bed three using genetic file 01."

The electronic sound of the computer, signaling conformation. A change in the white light beaming down at him. The intensity lowered as the light turned sky blue to comfort the patient's return to the world of knowing. Soft green/blue energy appeared around Georg's nose, spreading across his entire head. The twinkle of energy faded away until it disappeared. Georg's eyes started to flicker as he started to wake, moving his head slightly. Susan looked down at him, consumed with anticipation.

Blackness receded from Georg, the light coming in as he opened his eyes to see an unknown woman looking down at him, wearing an unusual formal uniform. The haze was starting to go, he looked up at the white ceiling, the sky blue light beaming down. Focusing on the uniform, remembering the deep, dark turmoil, the loudness of the gun firing, the shock of the realization which went through him, through his heart, unable to breath, the fear. Where was he? He had no idea. Placing his hands by his sides, his arms taking his bodyweight, he got up from the bed and screamed an ear-piercing scream.

Susan placed her hand over her ears to ease the pain...

* * * *

Holding the picture close to him, Clark was almost unable to breathe. He was consumed with deep, dull pain. Tears flooded from his eyes, the pain so bad, all he could do was lie there on top of his bed in complete darkness. Anne banged

on his door barely able to talk.

“Clark!” Her voice was breaking up.

The weight upon him was deep, sapping so much energy. Clark got off his bed and went to the door, turning the key to unlock it. The door creaked as he opened it slowly. Looking up at his mother, he could see the devastation written deep in her face. Clark grabbed his mother tightly.

“M-my brother,” Clark started to feel sick. Clark’s mind began racing. This can’t be happening. This can’t be real. Maybe I will wake up and everything will be okay. His mind became blank. Letting the emotions take over, he held his mother. Tears of pain rolled down his face.

* * * *

Georg placed his hand on the wall to ceiling window in sickbay, his voice so soft, like cotton wool. “A starship from the future”

Susan walked behind Georg, placing her hand on him, feeling the need to reunite him with his sibling; the one thing she lost herself when her sister passed all those years ago.

“I’m not sure how we’re going to explain your return from the dead,” Susan finally said.

Georg turned round the thoughts in his head, struggling to find the English words for his natural Norwegian tongue.

“Captain, me, my brother er...” frustration intense in Georg’s face. The anger deep in his stomach rising upwards, spreading across his chest, the sudden explosion as he turned round and the palm of his hand hit the glass. His exasperation felt so deep.

Susan turned slightly to look at April who waved her hand slightly, indicating to Susan to step back and let Georg have some space. April raised her voice “Computer, initiate translation to English”

“Translating,” came the elegant voice of the computer.

Susan spoke with a deep caring voice which was low and kind. “You can speak in Norwegian. The computer will translate. You need to pause when you’re

ready, and the computer will repeat your words in English”

Moving his hand away from the window, Georg turned round and looked at Susan and April. His eyes bloodshot, the weight of the misery within them, he began to speak in his natural tongue. “Vær så snill kaptein, ikke be meg om å holde dette hemmelig for min bror og min mor. Det er for vanskelig. Vær så snill å la dem få se stjerneskipet ditt. De er snille mennesker og de blir en familiehemmelighet”

The voice of the computer announced: “Translating: ‘Please captain don't make me keep this a secret from my brother and mother. It would be too much. Please let them see this starship of yours. They are good people and it will be a family secret’”

Georg smiled, slight joy on his face as he laughed, taken back by the technology.

Susan smiled, looking down at the grey floor, deep in thought, thinking about Georg's general welfare.

“Travelling along this timeline, when we go home, we will create our own universe, a parallel universe, so it's of paramount importance that the events of the present do not affect what we know to be true of the future. A zero change would be ideal. However, unfortunately, television pictures of this ship were broadcast, which I'm sure will go down in our future's history. Georg, I'm going with my gut instinct, and I am going to allow your family to board this starship, but you must all swear to complete secrecy”

Georg nodded his head in delight. “Yes Captain, of course. Thank you,” his English words sounded Irish, the Norwegian accent so strong, a deep rooted part of Georg's personality and soul.

* * * *

Clark wrapped deep into his mother arms, sadness overwhelming his soul, the tears pouring down his face. Abruptly, the door bell rang.

Neither Clark nor his mother were prepared to see Georg standing in the doorway.

Georg hugged his brother and mother tightly. The joy in the room was intense, Georg pressed his fingers on a comm badge and looked down towards his mum who looked up at him, “Georg, I feel strange.”

“It's okay,” he replied.

The blue/green energy started to appear around them. Anne looked at her son, fear and confusion evident from her silence. Georg felt Clark grab hold of him tightly. Clark closed his eyes, Georg knew he was frightened. Their feet, and the lower part of their bodies, disappeared. Anne took a loud breath in shock as she looked down at the blue/green energy surrounding them, unable to think, or feel, the unnatural outer body experience, thoughts started to come back to her. *Has my soul left my body?* Suddenly she could feel something soft on her buttock, Anne started to feel the weight of her body returning, realizing she was sitting down.

The blue/green energy started to fade quickly. The white walls which surrounded her convinced her that she was in some kind of office. Directly in front of her was a woman with long brown hair, in an unfamiliar uniform. Anne looked to her left, in another settee was Clark, his piercing eyes looking at the woman. Anne noticed the pitch black night sky from the windows behind Clark, not knowing the full truth. She turned her head to the right, towards Georg who had a big smile on his face, he seemed rather happy with himself. Anne's attention focused on the woman sitting in front of her.

Through the steam, coming from the silver coffee pot, Susan studied Anne, knowing that she needed to choose her words carefully. Susan's neo-cortex implants allowed her to listen to April's guidance as she watched through Susan's eyes on the main viewer. April was in the room next door, on the bridge.

Susan stood up, walked towards the coffee pot and poured coffee into the cup, she gently moved the cup to her lips and took a sip to indicate to Anne that it was safe to drink, she looked at the confused woman, “Would you like a cup?”

The computer translated: "Vil du ha en kopp?"

Shaking in fear, but feeling this woman to be trustworthy, Anne answered “Yes, please.” She laughed slightly, just like her son had the day before, at the amusement of the computer translating her words into English.

Susan turned her eyes to Clark, she smiled as they both remembered. Clark's eyes seemed to dig deep into her soul. He finally spoke, “I saw you when it all happened, were you the one who saved my brother?”

Georg walked towards the coffee pot and poured himself a cup. He poured a

second cup for his brother without asking, but knowing Clark would like one.

Georg walked towards Clark and handed him the cup. Georg spoke slowly but emotionally “Yes, yes she did...”

Susan took a moment to look at all three of them. *You're doing well*, said April's voice, which was like a thought which was not her own. “Anne, Clark, walk with me towards the window,” Susan nodded toward the wall-to-ceiling windows behind them. Georg followed behind. As they stood next to Susan, Susan said again “Please don't be alarmed,” then placing her flat hand on the black pad on the wall which lit up in a sky blue light said, “Captain Susan Atkins to Cato Lundstad. Initiate starboard remover as prearranged”

“Yes Captain, Lunstead out”

Susan turned to face Anne. “I must warn you that you might find this shocking”

“Intriguing is the word I would use,” Anne said as she felt the ship move around, guessing she was high up, finding it conceivable that she wasn't even on Earth, but didn't want to sound like a nut. The view outside was pitch black without a star in the sky.

The Nova turned to a three o'clock position. A gigantic gray dusty rock came into view, filling the window as the Nova turned. Anne, completely taken back, lost her grip on her coffee. She felt extremely embarrassed, remembering she was only wearing her pajamas and night robe. In embarrassed anger, she looked up at her eldest son and said “Georg!”

Susan smiled and gestured towards the window.

“And that, my friends, is the moon. Welcome aboard the United Earth Ship Nova.”

The computer spoke: “Doctor April Johnson is requesting permission to enter.”

Feeling rather puzzled, Susan raised her voice. “Computer, allow entrance.”

The computer gave its electronic sound of notification. Deep humming of the doors indicated their movement. Susan spun around to face April as she entered the room.

April was calm, the strong smile, her brown eyes looked deep into Susan's eyes.

April's voice was relaxed and joyful.

"Captain you are needed on the bridge. I will take over from here."

Susan wasn't buying the calmness, but read the unspoken words, and understood it was important to keep her guests happy and at ease. With the same delight Susan answered "Okay, I'll let Georg introduce you all."

* * * *

Susan stepped onto the bridge. Cato handed her a tablet computer.

"Tell me Captain, are you familiar with the work of Joseph Harris?" Briefly looking at the text on the tablet, Susan's eyes looked up towards Cato.

"Yes, he was the one who tried to send a proton into the future, but he actually created a means to vocally communicate to the future. He used laser light to twist time and space..." Susan paused in realization, the shock and surprise in her voice. "He actually contacted the UEA, even though, at the time, Harris was unaware of the organization."

The Spinning of Time

16.00 approximately

The ring lasers were spinning quickly. Now—now was the moment of truth. With the president of the United States standing next to him, the next 24 hours would dictate his future. He would either become a global hero, renown in the history books for changing the human race, or he would be marked as a fool. He was putting his reputation and career on the line. It all came down to this moment. Joseph pressed the button, and the blue neutron beam fired into the LOTART, in between the spinning ring lasers. The gravimetric pull of the spinning lasers, unnaturally, twisted the neutron beam upwards, as it made contact with the red laser light; the blue neutron beam followed its path down the spiral of red light. Joseph remembered his childhood playing with his slinky toy. Joseph and the President were suddenly startled. The secret agent instinctively lifted his firearm towards the blue/green energy on their left hand side. The energy was forming into two individuals. The secret agent felt a tingling sensation in his hand. The sweat of fear on his face as his eyes looked down. The same blue/green energy surrounded his Glock 22 gun—his security faded into nothingness. He gasped when he saw the two people standing in front of them.

The Asian woman took a breath and stepped towards the two unknowns, giving up on all the craziness, and said, what seemed to be the most fitting introduction no matter how ludicrous, “My name is Helena Ronner. I am the president of the United States on Earth”

Susan spoke with slight amusement. “It's okay, we are not extraterrestrial life forms. I'm actually from Texas, but a Texas of the future”

Helena took a deep breath “That figures, just like the movies. I don't suppose you guys watch Star Trek?”

Susan ignored the comment “I'm Captain Susan Atkins, this is Dr April Johnson, she is a medical doctor, and a psychiatrist. I know all this is a bit strange, but time is of the essence. We are trying to get home, back to our time”

“Did I... did I cause this?” Joseph asked

April looked at the man who had changed everything. “We don't actually know, but your work has proved to be groundbreaking. It is vital that you carry on”

Joesph looked confused. “My research suggests that the LOTART will only send particles back and forth from another timeline, not the future of this timeline”

A sadness was evident in Susan’s voice. “That’s the Achilles' heel. When we do travel home to the future we will create an entirely new timeline which fits with what we know to be true. It is vitally important our presence here does not affect the future; the future we know”

“Is your traveling back to the future going to end this timeline?” there was concern in Helena’s voice.

Susan’s tone was strong, “No, this timeline will carry on. I promise you. We are human. We are governed by strong ethical codes. We would not be attempting to go home if it brought this timeline into risk.”

Joesph looked at Susan and April, disbelieving. “Why don't you just use the Sun, or the Milky Way's black hole, the gravimetric field to build up enough speed to travel to the future?”

Susan answered him, “During this period, beam propulsion system theory was considered the mostly likely way that distant generations would travel at near light speed. In our time, this isn't a theory. We use a propulsion beam to travel safely within the solar system. Without it, we can't pick up enough speed. I can't give out any more information about our technology.”

“To create a warp bubble around a ship in a solar system would be catastrophic.” Joseph confirmed “But warp theory becomes possible?”

Susan’s tone sounded more stern, “I cannot go into this because the information may indirectly affect the future we jump into”

“Your ship was broadcast on television globally.” Helena stated

Susan continued, the sternness remaining in her voice. “We are aware of this. We can only hope that the impact will be minimum. It is a risk we have to take. Our ship is at a safe distance now and detection is impossible with your current technology”

“Have you considered the spooky action effect?” Joseph asked. The future you

jump to could be the complete opposite to what you know to be reality.

“Spooky Action?” April looked at Helena who was equally confused. Susan looked at Joseph with sudden realization. After a moment she answered him, “I- we did not put this into the equation, but we are not on the original timeline, these events have happened before, we have successfully gone back home to a future not too dissimilar to what we know to be true”

Joseph noticed the confusion between the psychiatrist and the president of the United States and smiled “Maybe I'm the one who reminded you in past timelines, and we somehow changed the laws of physics.” said Joseph

03.00 Approximately

An uncomfortable chill hit Susan; a dark inaudible twisting sound started coming from the LOTART, out from the ring lasers.

There was panic in Joseph’s voice. “Wh...What is that?”

“It's my future trying to talk to us.” Susan walked towards the speaker, looking down at the LOTART though the glass, which was protected by a dark layer of window film. The sound became less distorted, the sound almost like an old, slightly out of tune analog radio.

* * * *

The Nova computer spoke: “There are six people on board the UEA Nova 221406. Captain Susan Atkins, Cato Lunstead, Doctor April Johnson, Chief Medical Officer, Doctor Brian Federman, and an unknown human in Holoroom A1”

Susan looked at Cato uncomfortably. “We need to do a personal check to ensure nobody else is on board, how long you think that will take? Two hours?”

“She’s a big ship, but I think the four of us can do it in two hours”

“Computer, power down all operational systems, except the stationary thrust engines, the recreation generator, and life support in three hours from now”

The alarm sounded once on the bridge “This action requires security clearance from Captain Susan Atkins, Commander Cato Lunstead, Chief Medical Officer, Brian Federman, and Dr April Johnson.

* * * *

Reese May, the Secretary of Defense barged into the President's Office, unannounced, with a deep look of concern on his face. "Madam President, you are not going to believe this. I've just uncovered some information and came here straight away"

Helena looked up "What, what is it Reese?"

"You have heard of the Die Glocke experiment?"

The President looked at her chief of staff in frustration "Reese I'm getting sick of people talking in a third language, spit it out"

Military sternness ran through Reece's blood. This was one of those times when it shone from within him. "It has had a lot of media attention. Between 1943 and 1945 there were experiments done by the Nazi's in the Owl Mountains in Poland which can't be explained. There has been a lot of propaganda that—"

Helena cut him off. "It's nonsense. Apparently it was a few crackpot scientists, conducting experiments on time travel."

Reece went to look out of the window. "Madam President, we have unearthed evidence which proves, beyond any doubt, that the experiment was a success."

A deep concern overwhelmed Helena, as she tried to figure out the man she thought she knew so well, disbelief was in her voice "You're insane"

* * * *

Susan made her way out of one of many empty personal quarters and approached the next quarters, her comm badge sounded. "Captain Susan Atkins, from President Helena Ronner"

* * * *

Commander Cato Lunstead, and Chief Engineer Jordon Carter sat either side of Susan, next to Jordon was Dr April Johnson. Opposite them, across the desk, was the President and her senior staff along with Joseph Harris. The atmosphere was razor sharp in the Situation Room at the White House. "Okay, now you have my attention. We have no records of these plans." Susan stated.

Cato continued "It's likely that, at some point, these plans were classed as

ridiculous and were eventually dismissed”

Helena studied the individuals, with their apparent all-powerful knowledge from the future, wondering how naive or arrogant her statement would come across, but it needed to be said. “We believe that this technology from the 1940's will be a safer way for you to get back home because it doesn't involve high intensity lasers.”

“It's vital that history follows its natural course. These papers must be kept in secret or preferably destroyed.” Susan answered

Gravity moved Jordon's long dishwater blond hair forward as his gray eyes studied the plans. “This method is unsound. You would jump into another timeline, but there is no way of controlling the string.”

“String?” Reece asked.

“They are talking about string theory,” Joseph answered. “The LOTART worked by stretching and maintaining a natural hole in time and space. These rips are the smallest thing known to man, smaller than an electron. They didn't have knowledge of string theory at the time, but the Nazi Bell would have had to rip open a string; a hole in time and space for it to work, a string is just a tiny naturally unstable wormhole.”

Jordon smiled. “Doctor, your work proved that string theory is actually string fact.”

Joseph smiled a little unhappily. “I think we are going to give the Nazis credit for that one, even if they didn't know it at the time.”

Jordon's full attention went back to the plans, slight concern in his voice. “This bell would take you to any random point in time, past or future and to any random location. The universe is a big place. The chances are, you would find yourself appearing in deep space at some random point in the outer universe or on some planet that can't support life, either of which isn't exactly a nice way to die. There would be no way of controlling this machine or predicting where you will end up, the whole thing is a bad idea.”

“There's more.” Reece stated.

“Oh, really?” Susan said in dissatisfaction.

Helena looked at Reece in complete surprise.

“Your German military man isn't the first to appear from nowhere, it happened in 1993 in Denmark.”

Helena was clearly annoyed. “Why wasn't I told about this?”

Poland, Monday 2 November 1942

Obergefreiter Karl Richter looked at his friend who was pointing a gun at him.

“It is time.” Rudi said, in his native German. The wooden floor creaked as Karl stood up strong in his military uniform, looking at Rudi's Iron cross, remembering their childhood. Karl placed his index finger on the tip of the gun and lowered it, knowing that Rudi would never pull the trigger on him. Karl looked deep into his eyes.

“This is not your fault.” The unspoken knowledge that disobeying orders resulted in being thrown into an extermination camp.

“Come with me.” Rudi said unemotionally.

Future's Death

The sound of the huge steel chains clanged, their mighty size not only a symbol of the slavery used to build them, but the sheer size of them was a landmark in engineering, or it would have been if people knew about this top secret project. The slaves, mostly Jews, were gassed when they weren't needed anymore. You could see the chains going up into the blinding light, the light hurt my eyes as I looked up, but what a sight, the slight shadow of the bell as it spun in the sky, the only thing keeping it secure were those chains. I was scared for my life, and to survive you have to think about yourself. People have no emotional value, no matter who they are. It's hard for me to talk about this now. I poked my rifle into Obergefreiter Karl Richter's back, my friend whom I'd known almost my entire life at that point. But I felt nothing. I pushed him along with my rifle, another soldier stopped us and gave him some dark tinted goggles, eye protection. I already had mine on. The light would have blinded Richter. I walked a little further and stopped. I pointed my rifle and shouted, "Walk!"

I saw my friend continue to walk towards the light. He screamed an agonizing scream. I saw his shadow, he looked like he was kneeling down covering his eyes in torment. The shadow disappeared. I never saw my friend again. You have to understand the situation: I felt nothing. I felt safe. It would have been me if I didn't carry out my orders.

Denmark 1993

The air rushed all around Karl, he felt his body spinning round as the blindness faded, blue sky everywhere, he was able to push the goggles off his face as his head nose dived down into the sky. Spinning round again he saw the trees—the forest below him—becoming closer, larger. The fear struck him, followed by the hopelessness of his body spinning, remembering his son, his daughter, and his wife, he felt at peace, his body hit the tree, an intense whip. His back hit the floor breaking his back, his head forced back onto a small rock causing forever rest.

A German Mastiff ran to the corpse sniffing the body in curiosity, the owner of the Great Dane pulled the trees away, shocked at the sight of the body.

Two Worlds

The white painted wall, and the cold underground air, gave the large room an uncomfortable sterile feel. Susan turned as the corner of her eye caught the metallic door opening. The officer on the other side opened the door as a figure, in a silver proximity suit, took a few steps in and stood there. Joseph and Nathan, who were behind him, rushed to the silver man's aid, helping him to lift the helmet off his head. Next, they helped him take off his breathing apparatus mask. Helena, and her secret service officers, were in the hallway behind the figure, talking.

The helmet was released and Cato blew upward shaking his head, removing the dark curly hair from his eyes, smiling, the same joy could be seen in Joseph and Nathan, and the President as she walked in to join them.

"It was a success, I've been home. The changes with the timeline fit our reality. There hasn't been any damage or sufficient change as far as I can tell" Susan could not hide the excitement, the joy she felt as she turned round and faced her crew—all 174 of them.

Susan pointed at the first five people in front of her, "Stephen, Mirellia, Darryl, I'm sorry I can't remember your two names, get your suits on, you're the first five who are going home." Stephen smiled as he stared at her for a brief moment, his eyes speaking the words everyone was feeling.

* * * *

The hours passed, the day turned into evening. Susan looked at the last of the metallic suits which walked out the door. Her head turned, she smiled warmly at Helena. "Thank you so much for everything you have done"

"It's been a pleasure captain."

Cato smiled warmly. "I'm not looking forward to getting back inside that suit."

Helena laughed slightly. "Just think of home... I guess this is the *big* goodbye." She leaned out her hand toward the captain and Susan took the gesture.

The Tunnel of Hope

Susan heard the unnatural sound of the apparatus as she took a breath. The tightness of the mask and the protective padding working against her, restricting her movement; all of which gave her an intense feeling of separation from the outside world, adding the knowledge that they are, indeed, jumping realities.

The ring lasers spun their red light around her intensely. Susan took another step on the black vinyl runner, and an uneasy feeling took hold of her. For the first time in many years she began to feel a loss of control, a helplessness towards fate. Susan took another step. Through the brown tininess of her visor she could see the wall at the end of the tunnel, which was made from spinning lasers, was becoming transparent. She took another slow, cautious step, then another one. The wall became even more transparent as it was replaced by a different wall, presumably the same wall in another time as it was covered with a massive UEA insignia.

Susan noticed ghostly figures of people, featureless, but clearly human. Her leg moved forward again as she took another step. The wall of the past was turning into nothingness. The people, gaining their features, becoming more real. Admiral Mazur's larger body size and distinct features made him easy to stand out and be recognized. Susan took two more steps, the time switch had clearly altered. Under the deep breathing of the apparatus she could hear the faint sound of clapping.

Susan reached the end of the tunnel and admired the beauty of the spinning ring lasers, the spiral which formed the tunnel, the beauty which brought a certain amount of fear towards the LOTART. The joy Susan felt, and the feeling of accomplishment was intense as she stepped off the Vinyl path.

Some junior officers ran to her aid. Susan knelt down as much as she could, enabling them to take off her helmet. They quickly unstrapped the out-dated apparatus mask for her. The cheers and clapping brought a smile to her face, as she wiped the sweat from her forehead. Mazur approached her, his Polish accent bringing comfort.

“Congratulations Susan. A captain has never had to deal with the depth of a situation which you have gone through. Strictly off the record; I didn't say this, but I think it more than likely that you're going to be honored with a promotion”

“Thank you, Admiral... Where’s my crew, are they all here?”

“Yes, yes. All 174 of them. You will be joining them later for a celebration.”

“Admiral,” Susan interrupted, “they are still under my duty of care. I would like to see them to make sure they are all okay.”

“Quite understandable Captain,” Mazur smiled in agreement.

“Susan!” shouted a voice she knew all too well.

“Mom?” she said softly

“Susan I... I thought I’d lost you!” Tears pouring from her mother’s eyes; her attention moved towards the LOTART. “So this is the thing which brought you home?”

“Yes. The LOTART. Tell me, have you not seen this before? I was unaware of its existence until we jumped time”

Katie looked towards Niemir for answers “No. And I want to know why, Admiral Mazur?” Her tone was strong and demanding.

Susan shared her mother's anger. “All this,” she waved her finger in the air “was prearranged. The Admiral knew we were going to jump time, and that we would get home successfully. Who knows how many times we have done this. We are probably still doing it now, a countless amount of times in various timelines. I don't have all the details. There is a recording in the Nova memory which played automatically, shortly after our arrival in Earth's past.”

“I’ve—” Katie stopped herself as she saw some commanding officers walk towards them with smiles on their faces, wanting to congratulate them.

“Sorry Commanders,” Katie smiled, “this isn't great timing we are not ready to join the celebrations yet. We just need to cover some groundwork. We will be with you shortly.”

They smiled, one of them lifted his hand in acknowledgment, and walked away.

Katie tapped her comm badge. “Admiral Katie Atkins to security. Two officers to beam to my location in area Z99.”

“Security to Admiral Katie Atkins: Unauthorized personnel are banned from

that location, including unauthorized security personnel.”

“Security, I give you authorization, I take full responsibility.”

“Understood, Admiral. Beaming over two officers now.”

Katie looked at her colleague in sadness. “I'm sorry Admiral I'm going to have to place you under arrest.”

“You don't understand.” Niemir answered

Yesterday's Death

Blue/green energy streamed down, forming into two individuals. Blue lights flashed down the deck followed by a high pitched alarm. The voice of the computer followed “Medical Emergency in Holoroom A1.”

Deep feelings of mourning and respect consumed both Susan and Cato. Guilt wasn't one of those feelings as Susan knew that she did what she had to do. The bliss from a man who was in the wrong time was her only option. The only humane thing to do. In deep thought, Susan looked at Cato. “I think it is also time to put somebody else at rest after a few hundred years,” Susans voice became louder “Computer: end medical emergency. Authorization, Atkins Susan 116W6.”

She heard the sound of the computer's affirmation before it spoke in its calm, feminine voice, “The medical emergency has ended.” As though the great passing of time had never happened.

Susan looked up at Cato in deep thought “You sure you want to go in there with me. I do not know how his remains will be after all this time. I gave the order, I should be the one to deal with it. The remains could be extremely unsettling.”

Cato smiled feeling the sadness, the unease; emotional support covered his face and filled his words. “I've fully supported and agreed with everything you have done. I would have done the same thing myself. You shouldn't have to go in there on your own.”

Susan smiled warmly, uncomfortably, “Thanks.”

She pressed the terminal by the holoroom door and raised her voice, “Computer end holographic simulation programme, Johnson April Doctor 2a and re-initiate safety protocols. Allow entrance to holoroom A1. Authorization, Atkins Susan WHB2258732.” She looked up toward Cato and spoke more quietly “We turned off safety protocols so that the simulation would be as realistic as real life, so he would live a life without suspicion or confusion.”

“I understand Captain.” Cato answered back reassuringly

“Would you like to save the simulation at its current status?” asked the computer

Susan raised her voice “Yes.”

“A simulation running, evolving for all this time, has got to be worth something to the UEA” Susan said to nobody.

“Saving simulation,” the computer confirmed. “Terminating simulation... simulation terminated... Allowing entrance to holeroom A1.”

The doors hummed as they opened. The smell was extreme, sickening. Susan tried her best not to heave. “Computer initiate sterilization, Holeroom A1!”

“Sterilization in progress,” confirmed the computer. The smell instantly faded away. “Sterilization complete.”

Susan turned to look at Cato and saw the dribble running down his mouth. She looked at the floor and saw his vomit. Losing all self control her body instinctively followed.

History Maker

The heat of the flame could be felt against his arm and face. The bitter cold wind hitting him like a thousand pins. The soft cool sand in between his feet. The sea rumbled calmly. Helm, unexpectedly, turned round and looked beyond his followers towards the city's walls which was now in the great distance. Little wobbly orange lights, fires, could be seen dotted around the walls.

Helm looked at the sand below his feet and simply said, "Here."

His followers placed the wood, twigs and dry leaves on the sand, carefully positioning them. Lema took control, and, once he was satisfied, looked up towards Helm and gave the okay with a smile and a nod. Helm knelt down with his crackling wooden torch and lit the fire.

Placing the torch next to him, and resting his sackcloth on the golden sand, Helm sat down on his fur whilst the others also made themselves comfortable.

Helm spoke his wisdom whilst the others listen intently. The discussions became deep, and time seemed to evaporate. His followers' questions became more complex, more interesting to answer. Helm looked up at the stars on that beautiful clear night. His blue arm stretched out and pointed to the brightest of all the stars. He smiled as he looked towards the star. "Calma. The brightest light in the darkness." Helm looked around towards his followers. "Listen to me for what I say is the truth. Close your ears to outside interpretation."

Helma pointed to Calma once again and looked up "When the sun goes down look at the lights in the darkness and remember this. "The lights are other worlds like Troidon, but none of them contain life." He eyes darted across his followers, all eleven of them, before resting warmly on his young daughter, his smile full of love. Helm continued, "Life is a gift, more precious than water, more precious than food. God commands us to share the two most richest elements of our world, food and water, freely with all Troyoris, to all life without restriction. This is the way to purity and happiness."

The Full Circle

Susan sat on her sofa, looking around her home, absorbed in the silence. She went to her bedroom – the one where Vasco had asked for her hand in marriage. Nothing, no photos, nothing. Susan sat on her bed and cried, in mourning for a person she had never met, or who may not even exist in this timeline.

The computer spoke. “An unknown person is at your front door.”

Forcing herself onto her feet, she looked in the mirror and wiped her eyes. She looked okay - nobody would have been able to guess at her upset. Taking a breath, she walked to the front door; the cold October wind hit her as soon as she opened it.

A man with thick chestnut brown hair looked at Susan. “Captain Atkins, my name is Vasco Miranda, I'm from the UEA Research Department. Sorry for dropping by unannounced like this, but I only live a few blocks away. I would like to talk to you about your experiences on another timeline.”

Susan studied the Peruvian she knew so well, whom she never met before, in shock and surprise looking into his brown eyes, overwhelmed with emotions.

“Vasco?”

Susan invited him in, knowing she couldn't talk about her experiences until after the investigation and, presumably, the trial which would follow.

Darkness of Reality

The once great Admiral Niemir Mazur sat in his prison cell. Suddenly bereft of power, he looked down at the white floor, depressed and disgraced. "They just don't understand," he said, though nobody was there to hear. The way the guard and his colleagues looked at him now was unbearable.

The headache which had begun gently, started to nag at him, intensified greatly, getting stronger, deeper. Niemir stood, holding his head in agonizing pain. He started groaning as the pain got too much. The Admiral, weak under extreme trauma, collapsed on the floor. Thick black blood started trickling from his eyes, running down his cheeks onto his gray beard, the black liquid finally making its way onto the floor.

UEA guards and paramedics beamed down to his aid, in shock but professional - helpless. The blood wasn't human. Troyoris blood, the only known intelligent life outside of Earth, shared a likeness in appearance to human blood, but was more watery. - This, was completely unknown.

The rupture of his ear drums agonizing. He closed his eyes in pain. The extreme banging in his head, the deafness, the blackness which poured from his ears was excruciating. Niemir's eyes opened wide. He watched, helplessly, through blurred vision as the vomit shot from his mouth. The smell was strong. A cold tingling, numbness sensation overtook his body.

Niemir closed his eyes again, gasping for air, wanting, wishing for the pain, and the embarrassment to fade. Confusion, as the spoken words around him became sounds he couldn't understand. The fearful tremor as he went into a seizure. Darkness came, and quickly became unawareness. Urine ran down his large legs, the smell from his feces was intense due to his rather unhealthy diet. The corpse, which wasn't human, rested in peace. The body that wasn't Troyoris.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I hope you have enjoyed reading The Next Step. The feedback, from test readers, has been very positive, but some folk haven't realized the story is not a time travelling one. The good people, on the Starship Nova, somehow accidentally jump onto another timeline which happens to be in Earth's past, rather than travelling back in time. Think of two trains heading in different directions: you jump off one train and land onto another as it is passing. The second train becomes your reality. The concept of The Next Step comes from ideas which surround string theory.

In the universe of The Next Step time travel is impossible.

A large part of this book is based on the work of theoretical physicist Dr Ronald Mullet. I have added thick layers of fiction to his ideas, and included a fictional character who was inspired by Dr Mullet. If these ideas interest you, I would highly recommend his book 'Time Traveler'.

This novella has taken four years to write and combines current scientific thinking and how futurists believe the technology of tomorrow will be with added fiction. Being an author I wanted to write a quality story by keeping the adventure as realistic as possible.

This novella would not be, if it wasn't for the support of so many people who have given me the confidence to overcome my dyslexia.

First, I need to thank my friends who are in the Scandinavian smash hit band, Donkeyboy. I consider Cato, Kent and Peter to be very good friends, their personalities have been a strong influence on this adventure. You've probably guessed that the fictional band The Nobody's was influenced by Donkeyboy.

I have used some of my friends help as editors during the 'writing stage' of this story. Here is a big thank you to Anna L Walls who is also a fellow author, check out some of her books. Also to Ana Mckee who runs an awesome online store which specializes in bronze age Scandinavian goodies. Ana lives in America, but enjoys the style and craft of the era. You can find Ana store by visiting: www.swanfire.net/farmstore. I also say a thank you to Christine Maile, her support means a lot to me; this book would not have been possible without it. Christine is involved with a very popular, hilarious, online podcast show which has been turned into a stage performance more than once. To check out The 313

Show visit: <https://soundcloud.com/the313show-com>

During the course of writing The Next Step, I became acquainted with screenwriter, producer and director; Kenneth Johnson, thanks to the power of the internet. Mr Johnson is most famous for the vast, unprecedented success of the TV series, V, which drew in worldwide audiences. The show was dubbed an instant classic. Those lizards celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2013 (the same year this intro was written). His encouragement and guidance is very much appreciated. You can follow Kenneth by visiting: <http://kennethjohnson.us>

I also need to say a big THANK YOU to all my other Norwegian friends who have help in keeping my Norway 'real.'

I need to give a passionate thank you to [Magne Strømmen](#). His humour and intense encouragement has been a massive drive in pushing this book forward. Magne is most famous for starting the global Spice Test craze back in his teenage years. You can check out his mad teenage days on You Tube by visiting: <http://www.youtube.com/user/GistheName>

Mange is a very good friend, and is less crazy (in a good way) now that he is an adult. I am very happy for the professional success he has gained working for NRK. (Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation)

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Egil's partner in crime is Geir (they are related) and together they make a great team. Geir has dedicated his life to supporting service users with physical disabilities which is a job I once did. Geir is somebody who cares about people that is something I really respect and appreciate.

Kai is an outstanding proper (trained) still photographer. His work can be weird (in a good way) intriguing, extremely artistic, professional, all at once. He has

been picked up a few times by the media. His website, currently being redesigned for a re-launch is: <http://www.kaifoto.com>

The chapter title ‘The Beat That My Heart Skipped’ came from my favorite movie, starring Roman Duris. This is a story about a rough-cut, disadvantaged young man who was determined to turn his life around and face many challenges doing so. He achieves this by following his love for the piano. I would highly recommend this film.

I wouldn't consider myself a religious person, but back in the 90's I became aware of a Christian rock band called Delirious, and one of their songs was called History Maker. I have always felt that was quite a powerful statement, and it fitted well into this book which is where this chapter heading came from.

There is a beautifully crafted book that I love, whose author had such an impact on me that I tried to use her influence within The Next Step. The book isn't science fiction, but is a work of fiction, very emotionally charged, heart-warming story. Its words were written like a craftsman lovingly chipping away at a piece of wood, creating magic. The book was Heather Gudenkauf's first ever publication called ‘The Weight of Silence’ (Published by Mira books ISBN: 978-0-7783-0369-5). I am grateful to Ms Gudenkauf for her kind words of encouragement regarding my own work.

The awesome front cover was designed talented old school friend, Andy Medcraft. Andy is very experienced in creating book covers for various artists, he's artwork has also been used in television and film media.

Being a fan of Open Source, The Next Step was created using LibreOffice. To find out more about this Open Source software (free to use, as in free beer) visit: <http://www.libreoffice.org/>